

a very essential part. If the English traveller ever blushed, he would do so every time he looked at a French railway bookstall or a French provincial bookshop; not because of the audacity of some of the works displayed there, but because of their intellectual level as a whole. It is vain to try to discount their obvious and crushing superiority by the plea that we have more circulating libraries. Where we do excel is in our daily and weekly papers; but whether this is a ground for unmixed triumph is another matter, when one thinks of the amount of time and thought we daily squander in producing and reading what will be out of date tomorrow. But as a charming instance of the general appreciation of serious literature in France, I have always remembered the case of one Laurent, *dit Coco', accused of burglary in April 1909, who proved an alibi because 'Juste a cette heure-li je me trouvais chez un marchand de vin de la rue de Tracy et je discutais avec un camarade au sujet de la mere de Britannicus dans la tragedie de Racine⁵. This discussion was proved to have lasted three-quarters of an hour. No doubt, burglars in England *might* discuss the character of Hamlet in a public-house; but no magistrate would believe it. When our lower classes pursue culture, there tends to be about it all a conscientious taint of the philanthropy of the Sunday School. It is, no doubt, difficult to generalise; but I

have never forgotten being shown round
Carcassonne
by the custodian, an ex-soldier of the war.
A rather
peevish French youth in the party, perhaps
taking me for
an American, threw out as we went along
some casual
suggestion that all Americans ought to be
charged double;
and was instantaneously trodden underfoot
by our guide
with the cold and curt half-dozen words:
*Ce n'est pas
tres intelligent/ An Englishman of the same
class might
have thought to himself: 'Don't be a bloody
fool'; it was